

The Significance of In-Service Training in Developing EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Skills: A Reflective Qualitative Study of the CELTA Programme in the Libyan Context

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أهمية التدريب أثناء الخدمة في تنمية المهارات التربوية لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية: دراسة نوعية تأملية لبرنامج CELTA في السياق الليبي

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Abstract

Education is widely recognized as a central driver of both individual development and national progress. In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), effective teaching requires ongoing professional development to respond to evolving educational demands. In-service teacher training programmes, such as the CELTA, play a critical role in enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills, expanding professional knowledge, and fostering reflective practice. This study investigates the contribution of in-service training to the professional competence of EFL teachers. Employing a qualitative reflective research design, data were collected through structured reflections, document analysis, and engagement with relevant literature to examine the perceived benefits and challenges of such training. Findings reveal that programmes like CELTA significantly support professional growth; however, challenges related to time limitations, contextual applicability, and follow-up support remain. The study concludes by outlining pedagogical implications and providing recommendations to optimize the effectiveness of in-service training initiatives for EFL teachers.

Keywords: In-service training – Teacher professional development – EFL teachers – CELTA programme.

الملخص

يُعد التعليم على نطاق واسع محركاً أساسياً للتنمية الفردية والتقدم الوطني. وفي مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) ، يتطلب التدريس الفعال تنمية مهنية مستمرة لمواكبة المتطلبات التعليمية المتعددة. وتؤدي برامج تدريب المعلمين أثناء الخدمة، مثل برنامج CELTA ، دوراً محورياً في تعزيز المهارات التربوية للمعلمين، وتوسيع معارفهم المهنية، وتنمية الممارسة التأملية لديهم.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي إسهام التدريب أثناء الخدمة في تنمية الكفاءة المهنية لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج النوعي التأملي، حيث جُمعت البيانات من خلال التأملات المنظمة، وتحليل الوثائق، والاطلاع على الأدبيات ذات الصلة، وذلك للكشف عن الفوائد المتصورة والتحديات المرتبطة بهذا النوع من التدريب.

وأظهرت النتائج أن برامج مثل CELTA تسهم بدرجة كبيرة في دعم النمو المهني للمعلمين، غير أن هناك تحديات لا تزال قائمة، من أبرزها ضيق الوقت، ومحظوظة ملائمة بعض محتوى التدريب للسياق المحلي، وضعف المتابعة اللاحقة للتدريب. وتخلص الدراسة إلى عرض مجموعة من الدلالات التربوية، وتقديم توصيات من شأنها تعزيز فاعلية مبادرات التدريب أثناء الخدمة لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب أثناء الخدمة – التنمية المهنية للمعلمين – معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية – برنامج CELTA – (EFL)

1. Introduction

Education is essential not merely for individual success but also for national development. This significance has increased the demand for effective teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Consequently, the pursuit of innovative methods and approaches in English language teaching has highlighted the need for continuous teacher professional development. Many ELT scholars highlight that teaching is a dynamic profession that requires ongoing development, reflection, and adaptation.

In this respect, in-service teacher training programmes are considered a crucial component of teachers' professional development in many educational contexts. These programmes offer teachers opportunities to enhance their pedagogical skills, reflect on classroom practices, and keep pace with current developments in language teaching. In the Libyan EFL context, however, limited empirical research has examined how such training programmes contribute to teachers' professional development from the teachers' own perspectives.

This study emphasizes the significance of in-service training courses, particularly the CELTA programme, in developing EFL teachers' pedagogical skills and professional awareness. Although earlier professional reflections referred to the ICELT programme, the present study focuses on CELTA as the most recent and advanced in-service training undertaken by the researcher.

Unlike purely descriptive accounts, this paper adopts a reflective qualitative perspective grounded in professional experience and supported by relevant literature.

2. Research Problem

Despite the wide implementation of in-service training programmes for EFL teachers, questions remain regarding their real effectiveness in addressing teachers' professional needs. While such courses are often supposed to enhance teaching quality, teachers may face practical challenges that limit the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills. There is a need to critically examine whether internationally recognized courses such as CELTA adequately support teachers working in specific local contexts.

3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do in-service training courses, particularly CELTA, contribute to the development of EFL teachers' pedagogical skills and professional knowledge?
2. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter during and after participation in in-service training programmes?

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative reflective research design. Reflective qualitative research is suitable for investigating teachers' professional experiences, perceptions, and insights obtained through participation in training programmes.

4.2 Data Sources

The data for this study are drawn from:

- Structured reflective accounts based on the researcher's participation in the CELTA programme
- Analysis of CELTA course documents and handbooks
- Relevant scholarly literature on in-service teacher training and professional development

4.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring themes related to professional development, pedagogical awareness, challenges, and practical application. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of teachers' experiences rather than statistical generalization.

The Significance of In-Service Training Courses

According to Harris and Sass (2001) in-service training courses are considered as an effective method of expanding the skills, knowledge and the beliefs of teachers. Moreover, another definition by Kaplan-Leiserson, (2004) in-service training is a course that concentrates on developing teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes of teaching can serve the teachers to be more experienced teachers emerging more effective techniques and skills of teaching.

Furthermore, according to the CELTA handbook (2005) which stands for in-service certificate in English language teaching, it is one of the practical training courses which provides in-service teacher training and improvement for teachers' knowledge and awareness of language aspects that are connected to their professional practice.

Although ICELT is acknowledged in the literature, the present analysis draws primarily on CELTA as the focal training programme.

In-service training courses such as CELTA provide teachers with opportunities to engage in practical teaching activities, peer observation, and reflective practice. Reflective evidence from CELTA participation indicates increased awareness of lesson planning, staging, and communicative teaching principles. Harris and Sass (2007) argue that in-service training courses equip teachers with the knowledge and ability to adapt course books and supplement materials to suit classroom needs. Therefore, in-service training can support teachers in developing flexibility in curriculum design and instructional decision-making.

- The benefits that teachers can obtain from in-service training course

As English spreads and becomes a dominant and essential language for the globe, the need to learn and teach through it has also grown. Teacher training courses are regarded as unique opportunities in which teachers can raise their professional and individual capacities. It supplies them with skills, knowledge and competence to be well trained and become teachers educators. Rahman, Jumani, Akhter, **Chisthi & Ajmal (2011)** argue that, in-service training course can be seen as an effective development for teachers' skills and knowledge. In other words, it can present different techniques to update the educational change in terms of providing teachers with new activities and methods that can help in raise their teaching proficiency.

There is increasing tendency for materials to be developed and adapted; and the demand of enhancing teachers' awareness and abilities are needed. This imperative development can effect on how teachers meet the goals of improving their performance to develop and design their own syllabus and materials far away from the ready-made course book. Harris and Sass (2007) declare that in-service training courses can provide teachers with the knowledge and ability to adapt the course book and supplement materials to suit the classroom level.

Therefore, in-service training course can help teachers to increase their current knowledge and skills. It has a strong effect on train teachers to be more conscious about the implementation of new methods and strategies for changing and developing the curriculum. In other words, teachers who are involved in such a training course can extend their knowledge and can be able to create, adjust and adapt the course book.

Somers & Silkorova (2002) believe that such a change in the curriculum cannot be introduced without the need for teachers to be involved in training courses. Thus, there has been a great entail for in-service training courses offering new techniques, skills and knowledge.

In relation to this, various approaches and methods in the field of language learning and teaching have come and gone. Many scholars have different opinions and attitudes about these methods. Thus, teachers always recommended using and following new methods that have effective impact on changing teachers' attitudes to improve their ways of teaching. **Li (1998)** argues that there have been several attempts to develop the approaches such as ' the communicative language teaching' in which one of the researchers, such as **Bax (2003)** have argued that the CLT has a negative impact on learning, because of the lack of explanation of what teachers should do while coping with this method. It is clear that, this issue should be taken into consideration and teachers need to be involved in such a training course which can help teachers widen their knowledge in how to deal with these approaches. **Carrier (2003)** supports this idea, he claims that various approaches of language learning should be highlighted and elucidated to teachers by providing in-service training course in terms of the appropriate implementation of these methods.

As well, Al –Wreikat & Abdullah affirm that "it should be noted that one of the main reasons of for conducting in-service training course for EFL teachers is to highlight the approaches that the teachers should be equipped with while handling the curriculum" (2011, p. 192). Reflective evidence drawn from the researcher's CELTA participation indicates that knowledge and awareness in how to cope with the approaches of language learning has improved. According to CELTA handbook (2005), this program encourages teachers to raise, flexible, accurate and suitable skills of communication and various approaches of teaching.

Furthermore, in-service training course can provide non-native teachers with workshops and seminars which give them the chance to meet and discuss different topics and each teacher has the opportunity to gain knowledge and exchange the experience with other teachers about many issues related to teachers' development. Al –Wreikat & Abdullah "the in-service training courses should engage NNS teachers in discussions of not only how, but, more importantly, of whether various methods and assumptions about language learning can be applied in the classroom" (2011, p. 192).

Moreover, there are many different ways which can assist teachers to develop their teaching styles through peer observation, sharing and exchanging ideas, to gain more experience in teaching. Reflective evidence drawn from the researcher's CELTA participation indicates that teachers have good opportunities to develop and increase their attitudes, awareness, and knowledge of various aspects of language which are related to teachers' professional practice and enhance their awareness with resources and materials for English language, According to CELTA Handbook, this course aims at "extend their familiarity with resources and materials for English Language teaching and develop their ability to use, evaluate and, where appropriate, adapt or create classroom materials" (2005.p.2).

In addition, teachers who participate in such a training course will feel more successful and have positive attitudes to develop their skills, knowledge, and abilities of teaching.

A study has been done by **Harris & Sass (2001)** on the benefits of the teacher training development. The results have shown that teacher who involved in different in-service training courses are more effective teachers and have sufficient aptitudes and experiences to be good teachers. However, (Rahman, Jumani, Akhter, Chisthi & Ajmal) argue that "if teacher fails to keep himself in touch with these developments, he is proving himself as inefficient and ineffective". (2011, p. 152).

On the other hand, some argues that teachers have negative attitude towards these courses as they feel they do not gain benefit from in-service training course. In other words, the course did not serve all their needs; it had a surface effect but not the effective impact that could bring all the language input and the deep knowledge they require to be well qualified.

Ibrahim, (1991) cited in David, (1994) states that a study of implementation of new primary school curriculum in Malaysia reported that, teachers who had attended in- service training courses claim that this course had no difference to their teaching. According to Ibrahim "those teachers who said that their teaching had changed were referring to the content and skills taught and materials used, rather than the actual teaching methods or approaches. (1991, p. 119).

Furthermore, a study has done by **Al –Wreikat & Abdullah (2011)** on a number of teachers to investigate their attitudes about the in-service training course. The results showed that teachers did not consider this course is successful and did not add any new knowledge; because this course was unable to improve their performance as they thought.

However, **Samupwa (2008)** believes that there is a tendency to say that in-service training courses are not organized carefully to meet all teachers' needs, such as, in a way that takes into account the successful role of various approaches of teaching. However, in-service training course still plays a crucial and vital role for improving teachers' education. Teacher's role seems

to be critical and can be measured through various techniques. The capabilities of the trainees can be developed through in-service training. Merely the trained teachers can set diverse goals for teaching the language and they can be able to create and arrange plans for accomplishing these goals.

Moreover, **Ur (1996)** declares that one of the advantages of in-service course is that teachers can enhance their performance and abilities of teaching through self-evaluation.

It is clear that, teachers have the responsibility to evaluate their accomplishments and progresses. Self-evaluation enables teachers to assess their strengths and also the weak areas they require to improve. Based on reflective evidence drawn from participation in the CELTA programme trainees are supposed to follow some criteria decided by a number of trained teachers as the main principles for achieving the goals of this course. Self-evaluation is one of the main criteria that teachers have to do after each task. In other words, CELTA evaluation is simplified regularly when the aims of the tasks are obviously started. **Doff (1988)** argues that self-evaluation is one of the most important features of a good teacher. It gives teachers the capability to reflect on their own teaching and so frequently develop their own skills as teachers.

Moreover, when trainees manage to assess themselves, the trainer has the capacity to modify or increase the self-evaluation grade. As well, trainers discuss with the trainees the negative points and the weak areas that need to be improved to gain their objectives and develop their teaching skills. According to the CELTA handbook "trainees can evaluate their teaching, take account of feedback from tutors and use these insights to develop their own practice" (2005, p. 14).

To conclude, it is likely that, in-service training course is effective in improving teachers' perceptions. Also, it moulds the behavior of a teacher such that, their attitudes are restructured and their beliefs are reformed. The better teachers are trained, the better they can teach tomorrow's generation. Even though many challenges that teachers encounter in the in-service training course are considered in the following section.

The main challenges the teachers may encounter in 'in-service training course'.

The number of challenges faced by many trainees regarding the effectiveness of in-service training courses can be an obstacle for many teachers all over the world.

• Lack of motivation

Motivation is regarded as a significant factor that encourages trainees to develop their abilities of teaching. Some teachers feel de-motivated to participate in such a training course for many reasons. According to David (1994) many teachers, especially primary school tutors, are not interested in improving themselves. Some claim that the attempt of studying again is too hard, others believe that they are too old and becoming students again seem to be difficult for them. In the case of the CELTA program, all the trainees who participated in this course were adult teachers from different language centers in Libya. They are almost at the same age, so they were motivated to learn something new and they have the insistence to upgrade their knowledge. According to CELTA handbook 2005, CELTA courses might concentrate on teaching adult teachers, teachers in primary or in secondary schools. This programme usually focuses on one definite teaching context.

- **Timing of course**

For a couple of years, in-service training courses have been held to the trainees usually during school holidays when teachers are free to do training courses. **David (1994)** argues that many teachers feel that they deserve the break they obtain even if it is previously short. They will be frustrated and unmotivated to sacrifice it for other study purposes. The CELTA program has been held for the teachers in the vacation of the first semester. Reflective evidence drawn from the researcher's CELTA participation indicates that the majority of the trainees including me were unmotivated to participate in the CELTA program at this time; we were under pressure and teaching for many hours was one of the requirements of CELTA course. It may impose a work load on trainees, so they felt they needed this vacation to refresh their minds away from any other study purposes. According to the CELTA handbook "teachers will normally have at least 120 hours' teaching experience and must be able to demonstrate language proficiency to a level at which the centre can confidently expect them to cope with the demands of the module" (2005.p.5).

- **Lack of time**

Lack of time seems to be one of the main challenges the teachers might face. The trainees' lack of motivation can be as a result of the length of the course being very short. **Tomlinson (2003)** claims that when the length of the course is too short to permit the trainees to engage fully in exchanging and sharing different views and experiences, this may cause lack of motivation for trainees because the teachers do not engage in self- reflection and they seem to fossilize their own information. This lack of comprehension is usually as a result of the varied capability groups where different trainees can meet together with trainers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This may cause lack of preparation in the trainees to modify their accessible beliefs and performances.

For instance, trainers work with very definite limitations of their syllabus and sometimes present some developed materials as a separated part of their main courses. The criteria that are connected to the material improvement, assessment and adaptation is regularly fed to the participants; however, there is little concentration on how to enhance personal definite criteria to match the trainees' needs. Reflective evidence drawn from the researcher's CELTA participation indicates that, CELTA course runs intensively in four weeks of an academic year. Trainees were required to complete six language tasks designed to enhance their use of English for teaching purposes. Due to the lack of time, the trainees were unmotivated to complete all the six tasks in four weeks. Each task has to be submitted within two days so it imposed a work load on them. **Somers & Silkorova (2002)** state that there is some partial evidence to suggest that trainees' attitudes may change after the in-service training course, it seems that short courses may not provide the suitable setting for trainees to reflect on their practice.

Moreover, the trainers have to take into consideration that the trainees should be aware of students' knowledge and background. For example, in task five, we were required to create a worksheet that is appropriate for students in classroom or self-access use, try it out and assess it. Because we were unfamiliar with students' actual levels, backgrounds, needs and interests, we faced a kind of difficulty to achieve this task. The CELTA handbook states that "the worksheet should be designed for either a class or a learner with whom you are familiar" (2005.p.28).

- **Lack of relevant or sufficient resources**

Millions of books have been produced and sold to different countries around the world. However, in some countries there is a dearth of books that are available locally. These books are designed for training courses and written by experts of English tend to be a vital element of teaching process. It can be used by trainers to help trained teachers in develop and raise their abilities and knowledge of teaching. **David (1994)** argues that textbooks that are designed for training courses have to be bought from the UK or the USA are expensive. Thus, the matter of money has a strong correlation with the use of textbooks in some countries. The cost of these course books can be an obstacle for many institutions. A study on the in-service training course has done by **Khattak and Abbasi (2010)**, they deduced that in-service training course seem to be ineffective in terms of the trainees not being capable to get benefit from it, mainly because of lack of materials. On the other hand, few number of books can be available locally, but it seems that these books are written by native speakers who have no enough background about the needs of the participants. According to **Fareh (2010)**, many course books are in general culturally inappropriate and this may alienate participants and initiate them to increase unenthusiastic attitudes towards developing their knowledge and skills. In CELTA course, there was not a specific curriculum for the trainees, so they were given worksheets of some adapted materials related to the tasks that they should practice in the classroom. However, the trainees seem to be unmotivated due to the lack of books and the content of some of the adapted materials were not related to trainees' age, culture and religion. **Richards** supports this idea, "content may need to be changed because it does not suit the target learners, perhaps because of factors related to the learners', age, gender, social class, occupation, religion or cultural background". (2001, p. 4).

- **Lack of follow- up support**

Follow up support in the use of ideas and practices presented in the course experience rarely occurs. According to Tomlinson (1988) one of the main weaknesses of in-service training course is that there is no follow up to the course. In other words, teachers obtain no additional support or encouragement and they were not given an opportunity to actually implement their ideas and skills they have been given. The significance of follow up support has been highlighted by many scholars such as (**Lamb, 1995, Waters, 2006; Vilches, 2000; and Guskey, 2000**).

Furthermore, the role of follow - up courses is regarded crucial to supply teachers not merely with upgraded knowledge and experience but also with leadership to encourage their subsequent efforts to put their ideas into practice. Guskey states that "training sessions must be extended, appropriately Spaced, or supplemented with additional follow-up activities to provide the ongoing feedback and continuation necessary for the successful implementation of new ideas" (2000, p.23).

The case in CELTA course, the trainees provided with an effective ideas and knowledge, but there is no follow -up support that help them to implement and practice what they have been given. As trainees we find it hard to cross back to our authentic practice and to convey the advantage that we adopted during the CELTA course. So, the follow-up support is required. **Waters and Vilches, 2000**, state that follow- up support tend to be a bridge that has to be created and linked to the in-service course and its real practice.

- **Some recommendations and suggestions to improve the in-service training course.**

Teachers training courses should be more cautiously designed as all the trainees come to participate in this programme with their own experiences, theories and anticipations. However, as courses are not always capable of providing individual help, they should seek trainees with different facilities and encouragement to practice these theories in real classroom teaching. According to Tomlinson (2003) there should be some recommendations that help trainees transfer their common knowledge into their definite teaching realities.

Also, trainees should be provided with follow up-support that can assist them to apply their ideas and theories that have been given.

Moreover, promoting an internal exploration of self instead of a search for the external characteristics of a good teacher and the theories should be appropriate, authentic, and valid at a practice level.

Furthermore, Wreikat & Abdullah (2011) suggest some recommendations that help in improving in-service training courses. The ministry of education in each country should investigate the reasons behind some negative perceptions of teachers about the in-service training course and attempt to provide facilities and resources to encourage teachers to take part in this programme. The ministry of education also should concentrate not merely on the quantity but also on the quality of the in-service training course in terms of evaluating and improving the training course curriculum and the materials should be prepared well in advance.

Conclusion

To conclude, a significant issue about the effectiveness of in-service training courses has been argued in this study. There are many benefits that teachers can obtain in this training course. For example, teachers can raise their professional and individual capacities as it supplies them with skills, knowledge and competence to be well trained and become teachers educators. Therefore, teachers who are involved in different in-service training courses are more effective teachers and have sufficient aptitudes and experiences to apply their knowledge in their real classroom teaching. However, there are some challenges that the teachers may encounter in in-service training courses that have been argued in the second section, such as lack of time, lack of motivation and lack of follow up training support. Regardless of these challenges, an in-service training course as a continuous professional improvement process is regarded as an effective method of raising the skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes of teachers. But these challenges have to be taken into consideration by providing suggestions and some recommendations to improve this course as it has been discussed in the third section. This study concludes that addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the long-term impact of in-service training as a sustainable model of professional development.

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Compliance with ethical standards**Disclosure of conflict of interest**

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